



DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

For Your Information...

Backyard Composting

Why on earth would you want to pile a bunch of food scraps in your backyard and let it rot?

The idea may sound crazy, but it is not. It's called composting and, in fact, is a very good idea copied straight from nature.

Composting is a technique that is used to accelerate the natural decaying process. A compost pile is a collection of organic materials (materials made from plants and animals) such as leaves, yard trimmings and some food scraps that will decompose over time to create compost.

Compost is the end product of the decomposition of these materials. It improves soil in a number of ways. Compost increases aeration (the ability of air to circulate), water-holding capacity and helps plants absorb nutrients.

By making your own compost pile in the backyard, you can reduce the amount of waste you send to the landfill. More than 30 percent of total residential waste generated can be diverted from landfills by simply composting yard trimmings and food scraps. The average amount of material diverted per year by each household that composts is about 650 pounds.

How can you compost? Well, there are many opinions on how to build the best compost pile. It can be as basic or fancy as you like. It also depends on the amount of time and effort you want to spend as well as how quickly you want results. Some people, for example, compost by building a wooden bin. Others take a plastic garbage can and cut the bottom out and drill holes in the side to let air circulate. Others simply purchase a factory made compost bin made from recycled plastic.



Here is a general recipe for a compost pile. Find a level spot in the corner of your yard about three to five feet square. Pile yard trimmings, leaves and selected food scraps. Keep the pile moist, not soggy, by watering it occasionally. Stir with a pitchfork or stick every few weeks to circulate air (without air, the decomposition process slows) and distribute moisture evenly. In addition, mixing your compost lets each item contribute to the decomposition process. Don't be surprised by the heat and insects - both are part of the process. In fact, you can add red wiggler worms. They help aerate the pile and make richer compost.

When is it done? It depends. It could take several weeks to three to six months, but compost generally is done when it becomes a dark, crumbly material that is uniform in texture.

There are many groups and organizations that can help you learn how to compost. Check with your recycling coordinator or solid waste administrator. Check with Clemson University Extension Service. Check with DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling at **1-800-768-7348**.

RECYCLING FACT: Instead of composting grass clippings in a bin, try grasscycling. Grasscycling is leaving clippings on the lawn after mowing. It makes lawns greener and healthier. When grass clippings are allowed to decompose on the lawn, nutrients are recycled and beneficial organic matter is added to the soil.

Composting at Home

Most yard wastes can be composted, including:

- leaves;
- vines;
- plant stalks;
- twigs;
- branches;
- grass clippings (see grasscycling); and
- weeds (without weed seeds).

Food waste can be composted, like:

- fruit scraps;
- vegetable scraps;
- coffee grounds; and
- eggshells.

These materials can be composted as well:

- feathers;
- straw; and
- rabbit and hamster manure (but not dog and cat waste).

These materials should only be composted in **limited** amounts:

- wood ashes (a source of lime);
- sawdust (requires extra nitrogen - add more food scraps);
- plants treated with herbicides (the chemicals need time for thorough decomposition); and
- shredded non-recyclable paper.

Backyard Composting: Step by Step

1. Fill it.

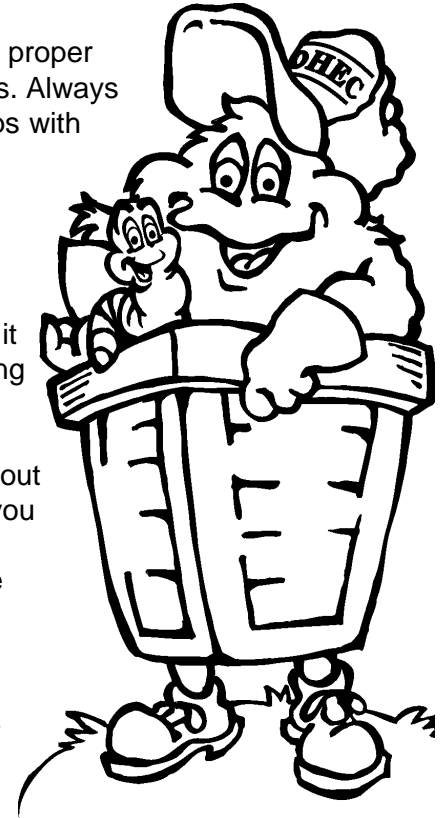
Fill a bin with the proper organic materials. Always cover food scraps with leaves.

2. Turn it.

Composting needs food, air and water (keep it as wet as a wrung sponge). If you want compost quickly, turn it about once a week. If you don't turn it the process will take longer.

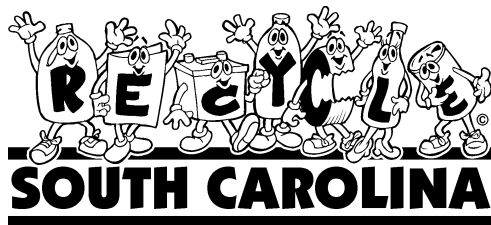
3. Use it.

Use compost as mulch or soil enricher. To make potting soil, add one part sand to two parts compost.



Bonus: Add red wiggler worms. They help to aerate the pile and make a richer compost.

FREE COMPOSTING BOOKLET! Call **1-800-768-7348** for a FREE copy of the booklet, "Home Composting Made Easy," by C. Forrest McDowell. Supplies are limited for this publication so call today for your copy.



Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling
1-800-768-7348
www.scdhec.net/recycle

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